

---

Kees de GROOT, *The Liquidation of the Church*

New York, Routledge, coll. « Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies », 2017, 192 p.

Barbora Spalová

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/57682>  
DOI: 10.4000/assr.57682  
ISSN: 1777-5825

**Publisher**

Éditions de l'EHESS

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 31 December 2020  
Number of pages: 223-224  
ISBN: 978-2-7132-2826-1  
ISSN: 0335-5985

**Electronic reference**

Barbora Spalová, "Kees de GROOT, *The Liquidation of the Church*", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [Online], 192 | octobre-décembre 2020, Online since 31 December 2020, connection on 25 January 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/57682> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.57682>

---

This text was automatically generated on 25 January 2021.

© Archives de sciences sociales des religions

---

# Kees de GROOT, *The Liquidation of the Church*

New York, Routledge, coll. « Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies », 2017, 192 p.

Barbora Spalová

---

## REFERENCES

Kees de GROOT, *The Liquidation of the Church*, Londres, New York, Routledge, coll.

« Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies », 2017, 192 p.

- 1 The book *Liquidation of the Church* has seemingly provocative name but also the long history of deep interest in church-society relations. The author, graduated sociologist and practical theologian, worked many years on different case studies in the Netherlands which he effectively brought in one original theoretical frame. It is mirrored in its structure: After introducing the concept of the liquidation of the church, Kees de Groot displays first the studies of ecclesial manoeuvres in fluid society, then he gives the examples how churches try to engage in secular sphere and finally he describes selected places where religion is used by different initiatives coming from secular society. The conclusion then alerts the scholars to leave moralist prognosis of dying church aside and to open the eyes, to see and to try to understand the fascinating transformation processes which are common in many contemporary “traditional” religious fields in western societies.
- 2 Liquidation is a double-faced metaphor. On one hand it is meant as application of Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity” to the religious field. In this sense it means liquidation, or maybe better liquidization, of the church organisation, adoption of more fluid forms of community and work, the liquidization of the walls and structures. The second meaning is related to the process of terminating the affairs of a business firm, to close it down and sell its assets (p. vii). The both meanings can be found respectively in

the described phases of liquidation: a. new reactions of institutional church to the context of choice and experience; b. selling of church activities to the neighbouring social fields, *e.g.* Chaplaincy; c. secular sphere takes up religious elements in new context (pp. 7-11).

- 3 Three case studies chapters follow this logic of liquidation. For this reason, there are no studies in fundamentalist reaction to postmodern situation although this reaction is no more marginal. The studies in the chapter “Beyond the parish” prove the authors deep understanding of the field – his factor analysis of the correlation of the Christian identity and perceived accessibility of the parish says that majority of Dutch parishes are “open” (other categories were: parochial, exclusive, inviting). De Groot acknowledges the importance of the faith of the unchurched and opens the question: why we as sociologists or anthropologists of religion are not able to say something relevant about it? Next chapter “Losing control” provides three fine case studies of spaces of contact of religion and public at large: chaplaincy, liturgy in living, spiritual/religious centres and markets. The last chapter “The world takes over” then presents other spaces of contact: mental health care, museum and theatre. The difference between these regions of contact is presented as a difference in the space for church institutionalised power which is limited in first case and absent in the others. The comparison raises some more questions: Have the values exchanged in both these clusters of regions of contact something in common? Is it possible to use or represent the religious elements without taking into account the power relationships around them? Or the art representation wants to disempower the religious elements? To produce them as democratic, ready to use or familiar for everybody?
- 4 All the examples of the regions of contact between religious/spiritual worlds and public-in-contact or public-at-large are highly interesting and somehow present in all the European societies what enable us to see path dependency or memory factors as well as impact of socio-economic contexts. I really appreciate the descriptions of the exchanges/negotiating/re-enactment of values, norms and emotions in these regions of contact, but what I miss is the description of ontological in/coherence of the regions of contact. When a priest-hospital chaplain provides the Eucharist to the patients, he is operating in the transcendental ontology where the piece of bread is the *corpus Christi*. How does he include to this ontological world the unchurched and unbelievers? How do these unbelievers create the ontology of the meeting with the priest, Eucharist, Christ? Is not this question crucial for the understanding of the position of religion in the society?
- 5 And finally, one remark from the perspective of ethology of religion: If we take into the account the Latour’s idea that we have never been modern, then the opposition between solid and liquid modernity becomes blurred. Religion in solid modernity was a play which should suggest that everything is formerly under institutionalised control. But it was never completely true as the studies of popular religion in all the regions prove. Would it be effective to take the lesson from these studies of the religious margins such as pilgrimage businesses or religious healing for comparison with the contemporary situation?
- 6 In sum I miss a bit the more detailed analysis of power relation in the regions of contact. On what is the authority of church in media production or chaplaincy based? How is the authoritarian position of the church co-produced or liquidated by all the

actors – by which arguments, with what kind of tradition, which kind of emotions (to reproduce the Weberian typology of legitimacy of authority)?

- 7 Kees de Groot's *Liquidation of the Church* doesn't answer all these questions, but raises them on the basis of very comprehensive, detailed and sensitive accounts of contemporary religiously inspired or at least flavoured situations. It is definitely worth reading: the understanding of the position of church or religion in Western Europe today should start exactly in these moments.